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SPECIFIC GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS

OTHER VULNERABLE GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS

Written statement submitted by the Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[15 February 1999]

GE.99-11398 (E)

Former concentration camp prisoners and other heavily traumatized war refugees from Bosnia in Germany without protection

1. For weeks, the Society for Threatened Peoples has been receiving calls for help from former concentration camp prisoners from Bosnia, whose residence in Germany is only secure for a few more weeks or even days. Approximately 900 former concentration camp prisoners from Bosnia and their family members are still in Germany; in addition there are numerous heavily traumatized war refugees, including many women who were victims of systematic rape. Most of these refugees are being put under administrative pressure to return "voluntarily". Those who do not leave the country are threatened with deportation. Only the few who are classified as "hardship cases" are able to stay temporarily.

2. The threat of deportation produces fear and panic in those concerned. The traumas already endured surface once again. Most refugees come from the Serbian controlled part of Bosnia, the "Republica Srpska". They cannot return there because they are not wanted as members of the Bosniak or Croatian peoples and because there are still war criminals in positions of responsibility there. All that remains for them is a second refugee existence in the Muslim part of the Bosnian-Croatian Federation - for those traumatized, a cruel and unreasonable prospect. In this 27 per cent of the total Bosnian territory, catastrophic humanitarian conditions prevail, especially as an additional 15,000 Albanian refugees from Kosovo have sought refuge there in recent months.

3. The traumatized Bosnian war refugees and former concentration camp prisoners urgently need security of residence in Germany for their recovery.

Background

4. "Hamdo learnt what it means to live in continual fear of one's life in Keraterm. ... Those who survived the nightly mistreatment, were dragged back to the hall like cattle. Some of the victims lay on their pallet for days until they died. No one helped them, because it was forbidden even to come close to the tormented" (from a report about a prisoner in the Keraterm concentration camp in Bosnia). Whoever has experienced such things is scared for life. Several thousand victims were murdered in the concentration camps of Keraterm, Manjaca, Omarska, Trnopolje, Luka Brcko and other camps.

5. Most neighbouring European States offered the former concentration camp prisoners and other traumatized people from Bosnia a long-term residence permit. Germany has left them in continual insecurity until today. The criteria for recognition as a "hardship case" is very narrowly defined: the refugees must be undergoing psychotherapeutic medical treatment. In some regions of Germany it is required that this treatment must have been carried out continuously since December 1995 or January 1996. Many of the former concentration camp prisoners do not fulfil these requirements. Some have repressed the terrible suffering in the concentration camps and not sought medical help. Others wanted to undertake treatment, but were not able to find a place in therapy or failed to take it up because it was not clear who would

bear the cost. The future is uncertain even for those recognized as "hardship cases". It has not yet been decided whether they will be granted a long-term residence permit.

6. The Society for Threatened Peoples appeals to the Commission on Human Rights to call upon the Government of Germany to resolve immediately the problem of residence permits for former concentration camp prisoners and other traumatized war refugees from Bosnia who are still living in Germany. Time is short because some of those concerned are already being forced to return.

7. The Society for Threatened Peoples asks the Commission:

To point out to the Government of Germany the special need for protection of these groups;

To call upon the Government of Germany to grant long-term residence permits to former concentration camp prisoners and other traumatized people from Bosnia who are not in a position to return to their country.

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